The Myth of BAYANI *and* THE SAGE

A UTOPIAN TALE

SHORT STORY EDITION

MATTHEW D. WARING

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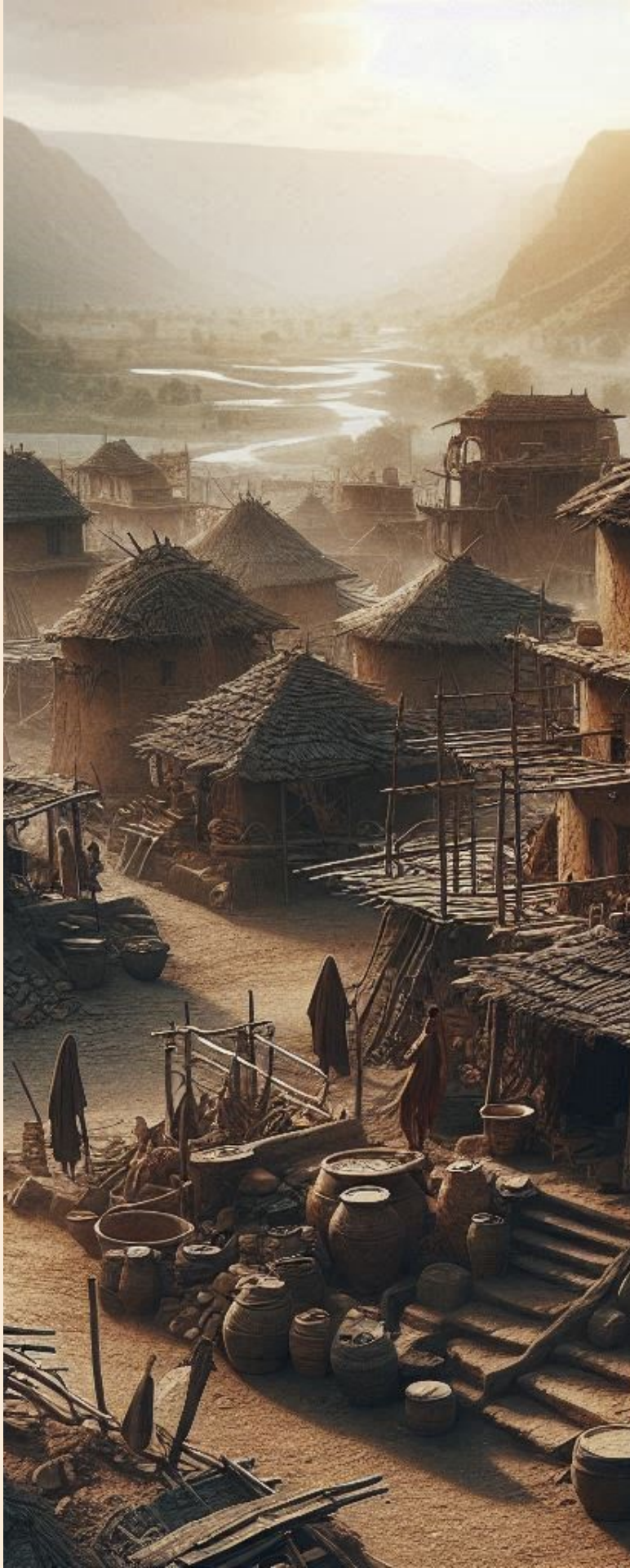
AROPUTO

Aroputo was in the far East of the ancient Mynuerpulos world. It had once been one of the richest states, filled with camels, oxen, aurochs, and fowl of all sorts. It was also rich in natural resources, especially corn, wheat, and flax crops. Its navigable rivers flowed to all parts of the Mynuerpulos, which allowed various commerce routes that enabled diverse trade. The Aroputans enjoyed the comfortable lives the thriving economy of their state made possible for them. Any man who was in good health had the opportunity to make a successful life for himself and his family. One day, Ru, a curious and ambitious man, visited the sage to learn of his wisdom. He deeply desired more knowledge so that he could not only thrive in his own community, but become a traveler and a scholar. He wanted to become a teacher so that he could be a positive influence to the people around him. So, he went to Sage. With no prejudices, Sage freely shared his knowledge with the man, teaching him everything there was to know. They had even become associates, sharing their ideas with each other while they spent hours enjoying scholarly discourse.

With the knowledge, Ru reinvented himself. He became an expert in trade and finance, even training the mensarii. As a result, the economies everywhere improved immensely. He was appointed governor of Aroputo. His influence was so powerful, kings and gods began summoning him to mentor them and their families and staff. This was originally Sage's position, whom Ru replaced. Because of this, Sage became filled with envy and bitterness and vowed to never share knowledge, again, with anyone else. From that point on, knowledge was hidden away. Now, the rulers and noblemen were the only people who had knowledge.



Bayani

Bayani, the son of Lemuel, was born and raised in Hidise, south of Aroputo. He was the youngest of his siblings and was trained up by his brothers to be a warrior. The qualities and attributes instilled in him by his parents and brothers were honesty, integrity, generosity, and kindness. He was brought up to value education and to advocate for the prosperity of mankind. A young man, he was eager to please his superiors and obeyed all their commands. Never was he out of line, for he was ever so dutiful. He always completed his missions early or on time, never asking for a break or leniency. He was an upstanding young man of the highest character who wanted nothing more than to do good for mankind. Looking for trouble was not an interest of his, nor was boasting in his abilities or achievements. He did nothing for praise; only to fulfill his duty of protecting and upholding the values of mankind. This had grown to be his passion, his love.

Aroputo was his second home. He had visited the region many times, growing up and had friends there. Over the years, since its government was integrated under the rule of Sage, the wellbeing of much of the population had dwindled. Bayani heard many stories from his parents and his uncles about the horrible conditions they witnessed when they visited there. The place, they said, was overtaken by poverty, since the crops had dried up and trade had become almost nonexistent. They couldn't afford basic needs, such as food and water. Many of the citizens had declining health because they were in debt with the apothecaries–sickly and frail. Bayani yearned to turn their lives around completely, so he consulted Radha, the god of prosperity about what to do to help the poor people of Aroputo.

JOURNEY TO AROPUTO

Radha, an old wise man and counsellor, advised Bayani that what the people needed was knowledge so they would know what to do to get out of poverty. The problem was that the sage, who was ruler of wisdom, kept the people from having knowledge, so that he could keep them under his control. Radha explained to Bayani how Sage had grown selfish with knowledge, which was meant to be shared. He told Bayani the story of how Sage had once freely shared knowledge with a man, eons ago, who took the knowledge and became wealthy and powerful. He became so successful that he was sought after by the highest-ranking prime rulers to teach them the knowledge he had. Due to the new demand in the man's expertise, Sage had been demoted from being the lead mentor, as he could not compete with the man's ambition. This caused Sage to fill up with jealousy, fear, and anger and he vowed to never share his wisdom, again.

After learning this, Bayani pleaded with his father for permission to visit Aroputo to meet with the sage (whose name was Sage), to negotiate a deal that would allow the people to have knowledge. After relentlessly attempting to discourage Bayani from confronting Sage, his father, Lemuel was finally convinced and allowed his son to go to Aroputo, fearing it would be a wasted effort. However, he knew his son's determination and that he would not let up until he tried and failed. Even failure, though, wouldn't stop him.

Bayani Arrives

It had been several years since Bayani had been to Aroputo. During the trip there, he remembered the times he visited there during his childhood. He was anxious to see if it was still the way he remembered, despite the stories he'd heard from his parents and his uncles about its current condition. When he arrived, his heart sank as he looked around at the once thriving, glowing place that was now tired-looking and desolate. The fields were dried up. Even the animals were lethargic. Some of them just skeletons covered in hides.

He rose his horse into the inner city, where he was met by people sitting on the ground with pans of water they'd managed to collect. They tried making the water last for as long as they could–until the next rain. Many of them stared at him with desperate eyes as he looked their way. He dismounted his horse, tied it to a post and removed the food he had packed to bring them. He handed out the food to the crowd. They ate eagerly. Some of them stashed theirs away for rations. Around him, vendors were scattered, trying to get the attention of passersby who were too poor to buy anything.

Bayani hailed the people's attention. They gathered around him in the center of the street with their gaze fixed on the statuesque warrior.

"Listen, my beloved people." His voice pierced the air. "It is time for you now to reclaim your lives. I am here to help you escape poverty and live the lives every human deserves to have." The desperation he saw in the people's eyes motivated him even more.

Moans and yells of agreeance and hope came from the applauding crowd. Tears welled up in the eyes of mothers, holding their children close to them. It was clear they had been struggling for a long while. It was as if a savior had come.

Bayani continued speaking to the crowd, making pledges of hope and promises of a better future. He encouraged the people that brighter days would come and that they would see their land nourished, again. He told them that with the power of knowledge, they would become educated people and be able to build their own wealth.

"Knowledge is power!" he proclaimed. "Once you have wisdom, you will know the path to wealth. You will acquire the best of resources and be able to afford more than what you could ever need, so that you may be a blessing to others!"

The people soaked up his message like thirsty sponges, as they were starved for even a glimpse of hope. Everyone longed to be able to tend to their own farms, be able to eat every day, and provide for their children.

"I shall meet with the Great Sage to negotiate provisions for you and your children. He shall bless you with knowledge so you can be free from despair, once and for all. Fret no more!"

Sage

The sage, eponymously named Sage, was born at the beginning of time, with the gift of knowledge. One of mankind's most valuable resources. He became the sage and ruler of wisdom. Though he was gifted with the most important attribute of existence, he was flawed, just like any other being. Deep inside, he was selfish and greedy.

He knew that without his wisdom, the universe would fail. Justly, he took great pride in this gift, but unfortunately, his pride turned to pridefulness. His arrogance and vanity would eventually prove to be detrimental to the state of humanity.

As ruler of wisdom, he was the authority of knowledge among the gods. In fact, he was practically considered a god, himself. He helped them enhance their knowledge and assisted them with accomplishing epic missions with his clever tactics. For his service, he was gifted great riches of gold, precious gems, and land. Since he was close to the gods, and because of his power, he was able to influence them to his advantage. Whenever there was a self-serving task that he wasn't able to accomplish on his own, the gods would use their powers to aid him. When he wanted the golden stream of Zbupesh for himself, he convinced the gods to give him special powers, which he used to trick Zarina, goddess of Zbupesh, to steal the stream. In return, he gave the gods part ownership.

When Ru, the curious man with whom Sage shared his knowledge, took over Sage's position, Sage was consumed with fury, regret, and hatred. He vowed to never share knowledge with anyone else, again. So, he hid it inside a gemstones he was given by one of the gods, for his services.

BAYANI VISITS THE SAGE

As Bayani promised the citizens of Aroputo, he went to the sage to negotiate an agreement for knowledge. Surprised at Bayani's arrival, Sage welcomes him in.

"Bayani, son of the good man, Lemuel. What brings you here?" His eyes lit up with wonder. A crooked smile on his face.

"Sir, I come in peace, to plead with you for knowledge. The people of Aroputo are in dire straits," Bayani responded.

"I know that better than anyone, my dear warrior." The eerie grin still on his face. "You are a warrior of Hidise. What makes this your concern?"

"I am a warrior wherever I go," Bayani replied, sternly.

Sage's eyes gleamed with the reflection of the candlelight. There was an awkward silence as he stared at Bayani, as if he were thinking up a clever response. "What gives you the idea that I would ever consider giving the people knowledge?"

"Aroputo is your territory. The land is barren–ridden with poverty. Have you no shame?" Sage looked intrigued. "With knowledge, the people will be able to restore Aroputo so that it will be better than ever, and you will be the proud governor of a new Aroputo. It will be like your kingdom."

"You sound convincing," Sage says. "However, I will not let you have knowledge that easily. You must search for it. It is hidden inside a gemstone, buried beneath a pile of stones, somewhere between the shore and the sky.

The Quest

Bayani set out on the quest for knowledge, without any direction. All he knew was that it was hidden inside a gemstone beneath a pile of rocks. He pondered on where Sage would hide knowledge if he had no intention of ever revealing it, again. First, he went to the mountains, where there were mounds of rocks that had fallen to the ground. Pacing himself, he searched through each pile, one by one, to no avail. Thoroughly scouring the shore, he walked the perimeter of the mountains over a period of several days and nights, resting intermittently.

With labored breaths, he climbed the mountain. He checked beneath every single rock atop the mountain until he happened upon one that appeared to have a faint gleam coming from it. He turned the stone over to reveal a stunning lapis lazuli. He summoned Sage to let him know he'd found the gemstone.

Sage chuckled. "My faithful warrior, that is only what *appears* to be a gemstone. It is a counterfeit. Keep searching."

So, Bayani kept searching. Finally, after no luck, he looked to the sky, as Sage appeared in the clouds, echoing what he'd earlier said to Bayani, *"Somewhere between the shore and the sky."* The usual sinister grin on his face.

"But, this is not possible," Bayani pleaded. "It would take an army of five hundred men, several months to find a tiny gemstone that could be hidden practically anywhere in the world."

Sage sneered, "If ye seek, ye shall find," then disappeared into the heavens.

SAGE'S TACTICS

Sage lies to Bayani, telling him that the gemstone is hidden beneath a pile of rocks, when all the time, he has it locked in a chest in his own library. Exhausted from already having been out in the elements for several weeks, Bayani continues on his unguided journey. He needed to replenish his energy, so every few days he hunted animals for food and built a fire to cook and warm himself by. Sage's plan is to have Bayani become so tired and weak from sending him from place to place in search of the gemstone, that he collapses and becomes food for the wolves. He wants to extinguish Bayani for trying to bring truth and knowledge to the people. It wouldn't be much longer before Bayani became privy to Sage's plan, after a dream revealed it to him. However, he wouldn't let on that he was aware. He would deploy his own tactics.

Bayani Returns

After his revelation of Sage's deceitful plan, Bayani prepared to return to Aroputo. As he packed up his camping gear, he thought of ways he could get help with finding out where that gemstone was. He'd been out searching for it for months, now. Surely, the Aroputans were becoming wearier by the day. He thought to ask for his father's help, but he knew he would be opposed to getting involved. His father had tried his best to discouraged him from going on the mission in the first place.

The trip back to Aroputo was long and dreadful. He was disheartened because he had promised the people that he would free them from poverty by bringing knowledge to them. He did not want to see them suffer any longer, nor did he want to go back on his word. He knew he had to fulfill his promise, one way or another. Although he was exhausted, he was determined to find a way to defeat Sage and deliver on his promise. Bayani was not completely oblivious to Sage's devices, but he chose to disregard them and attempt to cleverly win over Sage. Although Bayani knew Sage wouldn't willingly share knowledge, he knew the prospect of being the ruler over a prosperous 'kingdom' would be appealing to him.

He pondered intensely while he rode back to Aroputo, replaying the dream in his mind, repeatedly. He thought about Sage's plan for him to be devoured by wolves, which inspired him to devise a plan of his own.

BAYANI OUTSMARTS SAGE

Bayani formulated a plan to use Sage's own greed as a device against him. He knew Sage would be taken by surprise when he saw he was still alive. He hadn't summoned Sage since he was on the mountaintop. No one knew Bayani's whereabouts. There was widespread concern for him. His father thought he was lost or dead. By now, Sage was sure he had been eaten by the wolves and was only waiting for the announcement of his death. Thinking his plan had worked, Sage thought he was keeping a secret. Bayani knew he would be shocked to see him.

"Bayani, my dear warrior, it has been nearly a year!" Sage was clearly surprised, but tried to appear composed. "You have finally found the gemstone of knowledge!?"

"Sadly, I have failed the challenge," Bayani said. "I have come to surrender, but I have an urgent warning for you."

"Warn me?" Sage's eyes widened with bemusement.

"You see, while I was out in the wilderness, I was met by two wolves. They were going to eat me, but a beast came out of the woods and captured them. The beast inquired about why I was there. I told him about the quest for the gemstone."

Bayani told Sage that the beast agreed to keep the wolves from eating him if he led him to the sage. When Bayani told Sage the beast was soon approaching, and would be intruding on him, Sage frantically retrieved the gemstone from his chest of treasures. He hurriedly handed the gemstone to Bayani, entrusting him with it for safekeeping.

Triumph

Bayani, at last, had attained the gemstone in which knowledge had been hidden. No longer would the people of Aroputo be bound from poverty. He stashed away the gemstone into his saddlebag and hurriedly mounted his horse and fled to the city. When he arrived that early morning, he saw homeless people scattered around the streets. The working men had long faces, as they were slaving away for rations that weren't even enough to feed their families for one week. This would soon change.

He reached the center of the street and called together all the people. "Gather 'round everyone!" he exclaimed. "I have been on a long, long journey and I have returned, as I promised, with the knowledge that I said I would bring you."

As the droplets of knowledge rained down on them, the crowd gasped in awe and delight. Some people were jumping and raising their hands in the air. The children froze with amusement and awe. Mothers and fathers were crying tears of joy.

With knowledge now being imparted in the people of Aroputo, they would be informed about their surroundings. They could access information that was written and comprehend and decipher information that was spread through the orators.

"From this day forward, you shall have knowledge and it shall never be taken away!" Bayani proclaimed with great happiness. "With the armor of knowledge, you shall have the wisdom to seek and follow the path to freedom and prosperity!"

THE AFTERMATH

More than a year had passed since Bayani delivered knowledge to the people of Aroputo. He went back to visit, to see the progress the people had made. He was eager to see the changes in their lives and the new growth in the city. To his surprise and dismay, he saw very little change when he arrived back in Aroputo. Still there were homeless people sitting around–the very same people who were there, shouting with glee the morning he delivered knowledge to them. The majority of the people were still anxious about how they were going to feed their families and keep shelter over their heads. Most of the land was still dried up. Bayani wondered if the gemstone Sage had given him, was a fake. Though, it wouldn't make sense if he wanted to protect it from the beast. So, Bayani consulted Radha, the god of prosperity, to help the poor people.

Radha

Radha, the god of prosperity, was a wise old man who resided at the top of the mountains. Every morning, noon, and night, he looked down on the beautiful land as he meditated with his eyes closed. Sometimes he could be heard humming. The sound of his voice buzzing through the trees and echoing off the water. He had existed since the beginning of time and was revered for his mastery of success. Though his wealth and his possessions knew no boundaries, he was not in the least bit an opulent man. His happiness came from knowing he had the power to live life to its fullest, because he could transcend life's hardships that came as a result of the lack of wealth and resources.

As Radha had advised Bayani before went to Aroputo, knowledge was the key to success in life. Radha told him that it was the only way for the lower class of society to break free of their circumstances and rise above poverty. Knowledge, he explained, was the beginning of prosperity. So, Bayani was perplexed as to why the conditions of society had still not improved, after he delivered knowledge directly to the people of Aroputo. He knew Radha would not mislead him. He knew it would not have benefited Sage to give him a fake gemstone if he was in fear of losing his most prized possession. He was determined to find out why the majority of people in Aroputo were still in poverty and how to help them escape it. So, he headed to the mountaintop to get answers from Radha.

BAYANI VISITS RADHA

Bayani arrived on the mountaintop, and waited patiently until Radha was done meditating. He was careful not to disturb him. Finally, Radha opened his eyes quietly and slowly, saying nothing. He stared directly into Bayani's eyes for what seemed to last for a long time. Suddenly, he spoke.

"Bayani, my friend. We meet again, after so long. How was your journey?"

"The journey was long and grueling. It lasted for almost a year," Bayani said. "The mission Sage sent me on was a ploy to have me disappear forever."

"This comes as no surprise," replied Radha. "Common sense is just as valuable as knowledge, you know."

"Yes, but I made a deal with him that if he shared knowledge with the people of Aroputo, they would become wiser and more productive and industrious to make him governor of a wealthy Aroputo."

"Why do you come to me, Bayani? Are you in trouble?" Radha asked with a curious look on his face.

"I managed to get the gemstone and give knowledge to the people, but, they still suffer from poverty after more than a year later."

Radha simply responded, "My friend, you may give knowledge, but you do not have the power to make the people use it. In order for knowledge to be of any use, there must be motive, desire, and action."

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Author's Statement

A utopian tale of determination and perseverance, the graphic short story of Bayani and The Sage combines text with stunning imagery in a mythic setting that addresses the issue of poverty and how it is perpetuated by misinformation.

Bayani, a young warrior hears about the troubled society of Aroputo and is driven to help. Despite the warnings he's heard about Sage, the governor of Aroputo, he's determined to help its people break free from the stronghold of poverty. He arrives in Aroputo and goes around, visiting the citizens, hearing their hardships, having conversations with them in their homes (about to lose), in their shacks, or in their tents. Ultimately, he is able to gain access to knowledge to give to the people.

Bayani is frustrated that the living conditions of the people haven't changed, even after bringing them knowledge. He visits Radha, the god of prosperity, for advice. Radha tells Bayani that he only has the ability to give them knowledge, but in order for it to work, the people must take heed to it and act on it.

This story is written from a Marxist/structuralist point of view, as it sends messages to the reader about the state of modern society and culture. It raises the point that while we live in a society that has a governmental structure, too many individuals may become complacent, relying on others to solve their issues. Information should be free for everyone to access, but there are issues with its supply. Useful information could be purposely kept under lock, preventing access by anyone who lacks power and influence. Additionally, the information that is available, may not be accurate.

The story tells an important lesson in a creative way, reminding us that myths provide us insight into the conditions of our society today, and give us motivation to work towards a better future.

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